

Interesting Fairbury Civil War Veteran John Posey

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One of Fairbury's fascinating citizens was John W. Posey. His story began with his birth in 1847 in Kentucky. John was the son of John M. Posey and Maria Gundecker. John W. Posey grew up in Greenup, Kentucky, 125 miles southeast of Cincinnati, Ohio.

One historical record recounts that John moved to Fredonia, N.Y. in 1862, and enlisted in the Union Army when he was age 15. John joined in the 31st New York colored infantry Company G. and served until the war ended in 1865.

A second New York Civil War record indicates that John W. Posey enlisted in the colored infantry in August of 1864. He served until November of 1865. A third Civil War record recounts that he joined at his home in Greenup on April 3, 1865. This date was just a few weeks before the war ended when General Lee surrendered to General Grant.

The 31st Infantry Regiment, United States Colored Troops, was a regiment raised in New York State during the American Civil War that recruited black soldiers. This unit took part in the Battle of Cold Harbor and the sieges of Petersburg and Richmond.

After the Civil War ended, John returned to Greenup, Kentucky, and became a farm laborer. In the 1870 U.S. Census, John was living with his parents and six siblings. In 1878, at the age of 31, John married Eva M. Gaylord in De Witt County, Illinois. Eva was 21 years old when she married John Posey.

In the 1880 Census, John and Eva Posey were living in Paxton, Illinois. John's occupation was a barber. John's race was recorded as mulatto on the census form, and Eva's race was white.

Old Paxton Record newspapers chronicle the life of John Posey while he lived in Paxton. The first mention of John Posey is his marriage to Eva Gaylord in 1878. The second mention was in 1881 when it was reported that John Posey would give customers a nice shave in his underground barber shop under the Ford County Bank. Many small towns, including Fairbury and Paxton, had small businesses that operated in larger stores' basements.

John and Eva Posey had a son in 1883. In 1884, they bought a house in Paxton. John Posey then moved his barbershop from the bank basement to Coomer's drug store. John and Eva Posey added a daughter to their family in 1885.

In 1885, the Eastern Illinois Register published an article by the editor titled "The Campfire." This article alleged the cruelties faced by Union soldiers held at the

Andersonville prison camp were greatly exaggerated. The consensus of historians today is that one-third of the Union prisoners held at this camp perished due to disease and starvation.

The article incensed the Civil War veterans living in Paxton. Seventy of these Civil War veterans, including John Posey, published a letter with their names in the Paxton newspaper. The veterans complained the article in the Eastern Illinois Register was false and misleading.

In 1886, John Posey advertised that he would give his customers a Sunday shave for 15 cents. This amount would be equivalent to \$4.32 in today's dollars. Also, in 1886, John Posey invested money in the Paxton Building & Loan Association. John invested several times in this institution while he lived in Paxton.

In 1887, the tragic Chatsworth Train Wreck occurred. Thousands of people journeyed to see the wreckage site. John Posey and five other Paxton men traveled to Chatsworth to see the wreck. The wreck site was terrible, but they reported the worst part was seeing the torn and mangled bodies laid out in the Chatsworth town hall waiting to be identified by relatives.

In July of 1888, John Posey left his barbershop and went home. He found his 30-year-old wife, Eva, lying across the sidewalk in front of their porch. John checked his wife, and she was dead. Some Paxton residents thought that John had murdered his wife.

An autopsy and inquest were then held. John Posey testified that his wife suffered from fainting spells. Mrs. Posey had a wound penetrating to the bone on the bridge of her nose. She also had a broken neck. The inquest theorized that she was ironing and walked onto the porch to take a break. Mrs. Posey then fainted and fell down the front steps to her death. The final verdict of the coroner's jury was accidental death. The Paxton city Pauper's Relief Fund was used to pay the \$10 cost of the post mortem examination of Mrs. Posey.

Because of the death of his wife, John Posey was responsible for raising their three young children. Two years after his wife died, John turned his three children over to the Soldiers' Orphans' Home at Normal, Illinois. This institution was established in 1865 by the Illinois State legislature as a home for the indigent children of Civil War veterans. Jesse W. Fell, David Davis, and other prominent residents of Bloomington and Normal pledged cash and land for the home. It was later renamed the Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Children's School. After 114 years of operation, it was closed in 1979.

In 1894, at the age of 47, John Posey married Lavina Babb from Fairbury. John and Lavina Posey lived in Fairbury, and they had two children. Their children attended Fairbury schools.

In 1905, at the age of 58, John Posey died. His funeral was held at the A.M.E. (African Methodist Episcopal) Church in Fairbury. Rev. Ford officiated at the funeral. This small

church was located at the southwest corner of Second and Walnut Streets. This church was torn down around 1969. John Posey was buried at Graceland Cemetery.

John W. Posey lived a fascinating life. He was born in Kentucky and served in the Union Army in the Civil War. He was a barber and an active member of Paxton in the 1880s. He lived the last portion of his life in Fairbury. His name was often read on Memorial Day when the names of all the veterans buried in Graceland were recited.



John Posey was an African American Civil War soldier and is buried in Fairbury's Graceland Cemetery